‘W.H.Smith is not the only Stationer’

The title for this talk comes from my own experience, welcoming visitors to Stationers’ Hall on Open House weekend in London. So many who arrive do not know what a stationer is, beyond W.H.Smith’s. So, they are in for what I hope is a happy surprise.

The Stationers’ Company existed many years before there was printing in England. When it was formed in 1403, it was a ‘mystery’, an alliance of those who wrote or copied texts, along with those who illustrated them, and those who bound books and sold them. Unsurprisingly, its members were based around St Paul’s Cathedral, the principal customer for its work. Printing in Western Europe was invented by Gutenberg in Mainz in the 1450s, and the first printer to set up shop in England was William Caxton, in the shadow of Westminster Abbey in 1476. Caxton’s main customer was the royal court, but his assistant and successor to his business, Wynkyn de Worde, recognised that the future for printed books lay with the City and moved his premises to Fleet Street around the year 1500.

Neither Caxton nor de Worde were members of the Stationers’ Company: Caxton was in fact a freeman of the Mercers’. However, a handful of printers were Stationers, and their interests coincided with those of the royal court, so that in 1557 Mary Tudor granted the company its charter, establishing Stationers as the only men in the City to have direct responsibility for the book trade.

As illustration of the fluidity of trades at this time is my first Stationer, John Day.

John Day

This is a very rare early depiction of a stationer, probably used in advertising. A colourful character, Day was probably born in Dunwich, then a prosperous East Anglian port, now a mysterious ‘lost town’ beneath the waves of the North Sea. He came to London in the 1540s in the service of Thomas Raynalde, a physician-cum-printer, and joined the Stringers’ Company, which made bowstrings for archers. The only way of becoming free of the City of

London was via membership of a livery company. Admittance was by serving a lengthy apprenticeship (seven years was typical) and Day, in his twenties, was not prepared to do this, or by patrimony which he could not claim, or by redemption (by payment of a fee). The fortunes and membership of the Stringers' Company had declined, so his payment would have been welcome. By 1549 he set up his own printing house in the gatehouse of Aldersgate, transferring his membership the following year to the Stationers' Company.

These were what the Chinese might describe as interesting times, with much political and religious turmoil, the two being inextricably intertwined. Day was a staunch Protestant, so seized the opportunity offered by the accession of Edward VI to produce the works of reformers, with no fewer than 130 books attributed to his press. When Edward died in 1553, and the throne passed to his Catholic half-sister, Mary, John Day kept a very low profile.

However, matters improved greatly when Mary's brief reign came to an end, and in turn her half-sister Elizabeth succeeded her in 1558. Day emerged, and invested in a hugely ambitious project, *Actes and Monuments*, compiled during his exile in Europe by the Protestant divine, John Foxe. Known familiarly as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, it tells in horrid detail the sufferings endured by Protestants at the hands of Catholic persecutors. These reached a particularly horrid climax with men and women being burnt at the stake during the reign of 'Bloody Mary', but Foxe went back in time, with one woodcut showing a member of the Stationers' Company, James Bainham doing penance in St Paul's Churchyard following his arrest by Sir Thomas More for reading and circulating banned books by Martin Luther and William Tyndale.

James Bainham

Bainham was burned in Smithfield in 1532 as a lapsed heretic.

Although *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, running to over 1,800 pages with fifty woodcuts, required heavy investment, Day pulled it off, and the book proved a huge success. It was a bestseller of the time: owners would put a copy on display in their home as public testimony of their

adherence to the Protestant faith. Day's printing shop was in Aldersgate, but he wanted to have a presence in St Paul's Churchyard, the heartland of the book trade. Such a presence was much coveted, with shops even built between the buttresses of the gothic cathedral, and some printers having moving 'stations' or stalls, hence the name stationer. Day went for the idea of a pre-fabricated shop, but he had incurred the jealousy of his fellow printers, and his acquisition was blocked. In 1573, moreover, he was obliged to seek the protection of Queen Elizabeth's great favourite, the Earl of Leicester, when he and his family were nearly murdered by 'one Asplin', either an aggrieved apprentice, or a rival printer.

The prefabricated shop never materialised, but details of its potential construction have provided a rare insight into the appearance of 16th century London booksellers' shops. The lease specifies 'appentices' - penthouses or awnings - for defence against weather and heat. These awnings would have protected a stall or wooden counter fixed to the wall below windows, and the books could be laid out to allure customers.

Publishing has always been a risky business, but get the right product and it can be highly profitable. My next Stationer did very well out of his business. John Norton, who was born in 1556/7, was bound as an apprentice to his uncle, a London bookseller, before working in Edinburgh importing books from Germany. This time in Scotland not only established strong links with the Continent, but also probably brought him in contact with the King, James VI, who also became James I of England in 1603. From 1594, he was living at the sign of the Queen's Arms in St Paul's Churchyard, using as his colophon a rebus of a tun.

John Norton's colophon

In 1597 he published the herbal of John Gerard. The initial idea had been to produce an English version of the Flemish physician , Rembert Dodoens. Gerard, a barber surgeon, took over the translation and updating of the text after the death of the first editor. He produced a text which was heavily criticised by experts such as the herbalist Matthias L'Obel, who had come to London from Lille, When L'Obel claimed that he found over 1,000 mistakes, Gerard responded by accusing him of not being an Englishman and therefore not understanding the complexity of language.

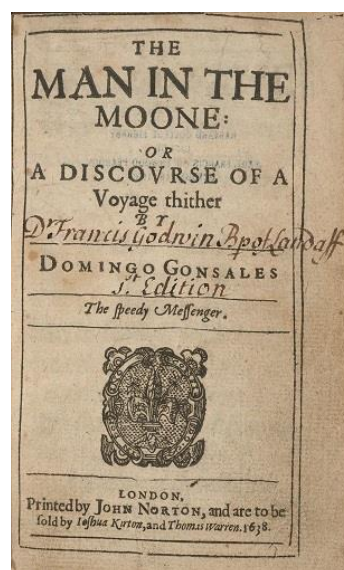
Not only did Norton have to cope with all of this, but had to find over 1,800 woodcuts of the fruit, flowers, vegetables and herbs that were a key component of the book. His Continental contacts came in useful here, for twice a year, Norton travelled to Frankfurt to attend the

international book fair. He rented from a Frankfurt bookseller nearly all the blocks, but augmented them with new images, including the 'Virginian potato' that was one of the scoops of Gerard's book. In a portrait of Gerard at the beginning of the book, he is shown holding the flower of the potato.

The risks of printing such a huge project were spread by working with his cousin, Bonham Norton, and the resulting book was a triumph. So proud was John Norton of the book that he presented a copy to Sir Thomas Bodley for his newly founded library in Oxford. He got a team of women and children to hand colour every image, no mean feat, as the specimens had to be in season to get the right colours. Gerard's portrait, along with the title page were engraved in metal as opposed to woodcuts. The title page was highly complex, showing famous gardeners such as Adam, and herbalists such as Dodoens, as well as the new plants being imported to England, such as the sunflower, and the crown imperial.

Norton was able to recoup his investment with the herbal, which became the standard authority for households for the next century, left in wills alongside the family bible. He went on to become the King's Printer of Latin, Greek and Hebrew, including the right to print school texts. He also became Master of the Stationers' Company three times, in office at his death in 1612. In his will amongst a series of bequests was 10 shillings to pay a preacher for an Ash Wednesday sermon in the Stationers' church of St Faith's in the crypt of the cathedral. The residue of the money he stipulated 'shall be disposed upon the Company of Stationers at Stationers' Hall in cakes, wine and ale after or before the sermon'. And so we still enjoy cakes and ale every year.

Although the two stationers I have just talked about did make money, many others did not prosper. A very different threat, moreover, faced the printers and booksellers of the mid-17th century. One of these was Joshua Kirton, whom we know about because he was the main bookseller of Samuel Pepys: in other words, not only selling him his own products, but also those of other publishers.



The title page of *The Man in the Moone*,
printed by one of the Norton family for Joshua Kirton

Joshua Kirton had his shop at the sign of the King’s Arms in the easternmost area of the Churchyard by Paul’s Cross. His premises probably resembled a description that we have from an inventory of the period, with the living quarters above , a counting house at the back, and the shop at the front, furnished with presses and shelves, and a screen dividing the main part from an inner sanctum where important customers could be entertained. Pepys’s diary entry for 10 December 1663 runs: ‘I did here sit two or three hours, calling for twenty books to lay this money [£2 to £3] out upon: and found myself at a great loss where to choose, and do see how my nature would gladly returne to the laying out of money in this trade’. He looked at an edition of Chaucer, plays by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Francis Beaumont, two books about London, Dugdale’s history of St Paul’s Cathedral and Stow’s Survey, and a book of natural history by Gesner. In the end he chose a book of sermons, *Delices de Hollande* and Samuel Butler’s *Hudibras*, ‘now in greatest Fashion for drollery, though I cannot, I confess, see enough where the wit lies’. Having made his choice, he took a link home, possibly with the books, although he probably had them specially bound for him.

In 1666, however, fire struck the capital. Many booksellers, realising that the flames were coming in their direction, made the fatal decision to put their stock for safe keeping in their church, St Faith’s, underneath the cathedral. St Paul’s was actually under scaffolding at this time, so that when the fire reached the Churchyard, the wooden platforms and staves quickly were alight, followed by the roof. The molten lead flowed down into the cathedral space and the booksellers’ papers went up as if in a bonfire. The fire also destroyed Stationers’ Hall nearby, and Christchurch in Newgate Street. Of all the businesses in London, it is reckoned that the Stationers suffered the worst loss. Pepys sadly noted in his diary that ‘Kirton, poor man’ died soon after, probably brought down by grief. The Clerk of the Stationers’, George Tokefield, had shown more foresight, loading the precious Company registers in a barrow and wheeling them to his home in Clerkenwell.

In the years that followed, the Stationers rebuilt their businesses along with their houses in St Paul’s Churchyard, watched over by the rising construction of Wren’s cathedral. It was a time to resort to all kinds of marketing ploys to increase sales, such as lotteries, auctions, and catalogues. The trade was also expanding out of the City, particularly westwards to the new and fashionable suburbs such as Holborn and Covent Garden.

Pepys, as noted above, bought a copy of Samuel Butler’s poem in the form of a mock romance, which he called a drollery. This was a time when the majority of books produced were non-fiction, but one Stationer did recognise that the future might lie in fiction. This was Samuel Richardson who. like Tom in William Hogarth’s series of prints of the upwardly mobile ‘Industrious ‘Prentice’, moved from the margins of printing trade to marry his master’s daughter and become Master of the Stationers’ Company. One of his early publications was *The Apprentices’ Vade Mecum*, a book of advice on morals and conduct. As a teenager, he wrote letters for young lovers, providing him with experience, so that when fellow printers encouraged him to write on concerns of everyday life, he began to work on *Pamela.* The first part was published 1740.

Richardson acted as ‘editor’ with the plot developed by six correspondents, telling the story of Pamela Andrews, an unusually literate servant girl of 15 who suffers all kinds of misfortunes, including attempted rape and mock marriage before winning over her seducer through her goodness and accepts his hand in a genuine marriage. The second part of the novel was published in 1741, relating Pamela’s life as a perfect wife. Clergymen took up the theme, extolling the theme set out on the title page, a story designed ‘to cultivate the

principles of religion and virtue in minds of youth of both sexes'. Like the Archers today, for his audience fiction often merged with reality. Church bells were rung in Slough when the local blacksmith reached the wedding section in his public readings.

Samuel Richardson

Richardson also incurred ridicule. *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* was quickly produced by 'Conny Keyber'. This was almost certainly Henry Fielding, who went on to deride the book openly in his novel, *The History of Joseph Andrews,* a story of Pamela's equally virtuous brother, who as a footman not only resists the advances of the housekeeper, but also the mistress of the house. Richardson, a rather pompous character, never forgave Fielding, but *Pamela* made him prosper, and put the novel as a genre firmly on the map.

Another Stationer with echoes of the industrious apprentice is John Boydell. Born in Shropshire in 1720, Boydell was intended as a house steward, but was so impressed by seeing a print of a Welsh castle that, at the advanced age of 20, he apprenticed himself to the engraver William Toms in Holborn. He rose through the ranks, becoming a journeyman, a freeman of the Stationers', purchased a shop, became an alderman in 1751 – he is usually known as Alderman Boydell – Master of the Stationers', and Lord Mayor of London in 1790.

John Boydell

Boydell was fascinated by Shakespeare, and commissioned leading artists such as Joshua Reynolds and Angelica Kauffmann to paint scenes from his plays. 34 paintings by 18 artists were exhibited in a new gallery in Pall Mall, opened in 1789. He also engaged various engravers to work on a sumptuous set of prints for sale. James Gillray, however, was rejected, and in revenge caricatured Boydell as a greedy rascal, ripping off the public with his gallery.

'Shakespeare sacrificed to the Offering to Avarice'

This satire is entitled 'Shakespeare sacrificed to the Offering to Avarice'.

In fact, the project was over-ambitious and collapsed. This was a disastrous time to produce luxury goods with war raging in Europe. Boydell tried to raise money by offering the prints in a lottery, and almost reached his target, when he died of a chill one foggy day in 1804 after he insisted on going to the Old Bailey to carry out his aldermanic duties.

The theme of the industrious apprentice continues yet again with my next Stationer, a man with a very familiar surname, Luke Hansard. In his autobiography he wrote: 'My Master [a printer in Norwich] was but rarely in the office … but I increased my diligence to serve my Master, because I loved him and I delighted in my business so that in a short space of time I became an expert; I was proud in being compositor & pressman, corrector and manager, copperplate printer and shopman, bookkeeper and accountant to this chequered business.'

Hansard moved to London in 1772 and found work with a compositor in Lincoln's Inn Fields who printed not only for the book and general trades, but also for parliament. By the time he was admitted to the livery of the Stationers' Company in 1799, he had become the head of the business, eventually working with his sons. As printer to the House of Commons, he came under the authority of the Speaker with whom he worked closely on preparing for publication the Journal or daily record of the decisions of the House, and the reports of the select committees. In addition, he also worked for various government departments, and before the

House of Commons had a library, he undertook the collecting of a complete run of sessional papers: these are still consulted today.

Luke Hansard

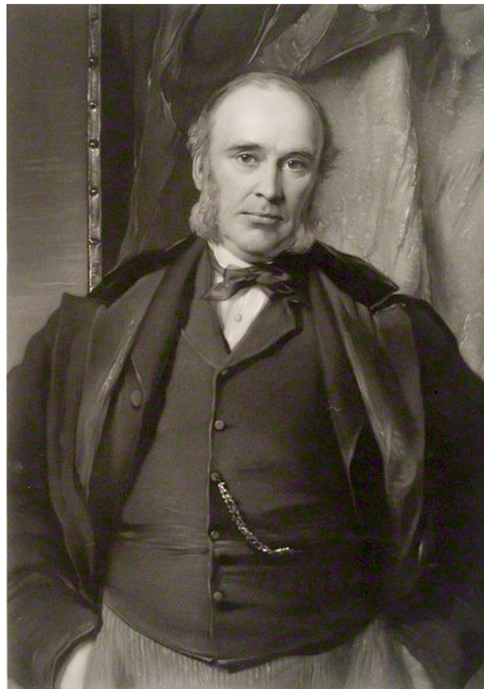
Hansard had a sure eye for type, and skill in designing what were complex pages of debates and committee reports. In 1822 he explained to the select committee on public printing that unlike other printing offices where the men were left to use their own judgement, he was careful to do it himself. ‘As soon as the manuscript comes to me, I sit down and draw that scheme out upon paper, the very size that men are to work to it to, the quantity they are to take into a page, and the various widths of each; how far they are to go, and what quantity of pages that particular paper is to make.’ However, he was a hard taskmaster and plainly a control freak, while his workmen were demanding higher wages in a time of inflation and political unrest. This is all too familiar a scenario, but in the 1820s there was also a growing demand for reform of the House of Commons. Worn out by the demands of his role, he died in 1828, but the business of printing for parliament was continued by his sons.

The Hansards were one of a series of printing and publishing dynasties. If you visit Stationers’ Hall today and look at the list of masters painted in gold on panels of the dining hall, the name Rivington appears again and again. The publishing house was established in St Paul’s Churchyard by the first Charles Rivington in 1718. He was one of the people who encouraged Richardson to write *Pamela*, and Charles of the second generation was apprenticed to Samuel. The Rivingtons specialised in ‘exotic’ sorts of bibles and prayer-books, printing in many foreign languages, as well as schoolbooks, highly profitable areas. The Company still has a Charles Rivington, who, like his ancestors, has served as Master.

Another family with long connections with the Company are the Harrisons, starting with Thomas who established his business in 1759. In the 19th century Harrison’s was the royal printer, specialising in codes and ciphers, as well as postage stamps and currency for countries all over the world. But they also printed the *London Gazette* and *Burke’s Peerage*. There is a Harrison in the Company today, Richard of the 8th generation. The printing of

currency was a highly lucrative business, but for the Waterlows, another printing dynasty, it went dramatically awry in the early 20th century. In 1924 the firm printed notes as a special issue for Angola, commissioned by what they thought was the Bank of Portugal. In fact, a major fraud had taken place and the Bank duly sued Waterlow's for damages. The case went up through the courts to the House of Lords, who found in favour of the Bankof Portugal, and is now enshrined in legal precedent.

At the end of the 19th century, livery companies throughout the City sought to develop associations with the rich and powerful by offering them honorary freedom. Today, the Stationers' Company is proud of the fact that its members are almost entirely in the trade, which is not the case with most other companies, and this has been a long tradition. As the company's official history points out 'While the Clothworkers and Merchant Taylors dallied with various princes and dukes, the Stationers offered the freedom to W.H.Smith' in 1880. He may have been an MP and the first Lord of the Admiralty, teased by Gilbert & Sullivan as 'the Ruler of the Queen's Navee' in *HMS Pinafore*, but he was indubitably 'in the trade'.

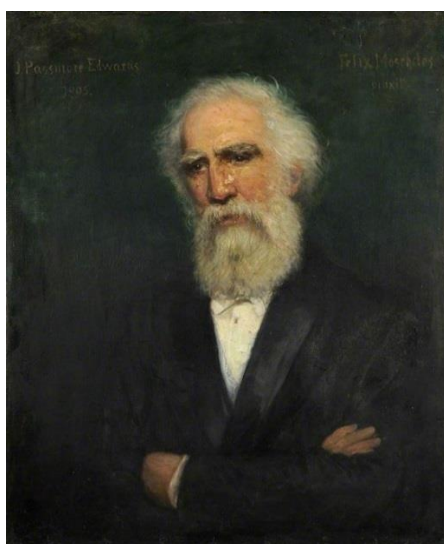


W.H.Smith

Smith's father, also W.H. for William Henry, had established a newswalk in Mayfair in the 1790s, selling and distributing newspapers. By 1821, just four years before Smith Junior's birth, the firm had moved to the Strand, close both to Fleet Street and to the coaching inns from which newspapers would be sent out all over the country. When the younger Smith entered the family firm, he recognised that the railway was the transport of the future and, overriding paternal objections, rented his first bookstall at the London and North Western Railway's Euston Station, and then acquired exclusive rights to other bookstalls on the company's system. These stalls sold all the things a traveller might need, such as rugs and candles, maps and newspapers, and also books. He realised that reading a book in a lumbering stage coach presented challenges, but trains were quite a different matter. For an annual fee of one guinea per volume, travellers could register at one of the major bookstalls and borrow from its stock, returning the book to the same stall.

Smith disliked the ponderous three-decker novels that were the fashion in Victorian England, and instead stocked cheaper, single works. Market research showed him that women liked fiction that was not too serious, schoolboys went for gory historical tales, Yorkshire did not buy poetry, Liverpool did not care for religion, and the American writer Washington Irving went down well everywhere. W.H.Smith not only did his research carefully, he also leased blank walls on railways stations onto which eye-catching advertisements were pasted. He enjoyed the monopoly of *The Times* throughout the country, and made a fortune from this and his shrewd book publishing activities. He then entered Parliament as a Conservative MP, and one of his biographers noted how his success signified a shift in the political allegiances of the commercial classes. He seemed the embodiment of a new school of conservatism whose leaders were firm and prosperous, but not imperious, privileged or reactionary. No wonder the Stationers decided to make him their first Honorary Freeman.

Another early honorary freeman of the Stationers was John Passmore Edwards.



John Passmore Edwards

Remarkably he came from a very deprived background, born in Cornwall in 1823, the son of a carpenter. He recalled in his autobiography how he read by light of a single candle in the midst of noisy family life, writing how ‘Hundreds and hundreds of times I pressed my thumbs firmly on my ears until they ached, in order to read with as little distraction as possible’. Leaving the village school at the age of twelve, he helped his father while continuing his studies after work, teaching himself from the cheap books he was able to buy. His reward was to become the clerk of a Truro lawyer, and then the representative in Manchester of the *Sentinel,* a London weekly newspaper which was part of the propaganda campaign of the Anti-Corn Law League.

Passmore Edwards tried various doomed publishing enterprises in newspapers and magazines, before succeeding with *Building News* and the *Mechanics Magazine* and striking it rich with the *Echo*. The profit that he gained from the *Echo* he devoted entirely to finance a programme of philanthropy: for schools, hospitals, museums and libraries, in particular in Cornwall and the poorer parts of London.

Whitechapel Library

Stratford Museum

His interest in funding public libraries echoes that of his contemporary, Andrew Carnegie, who also was born into poverty, the son of a Dunfermline weaver who emigrated to the States, where he built up an immense fortune through steel, railroads and newspaper publishing. Carnegie's motto was 'the man who dies rich, dies disgraced' and he founded

nearly 2,000 libraries in the US and 600 in Britain. The two men went into partnership at the *Echo* in 1884, but ironically this did not flourish.

Passmore Edwards is probably not as well known as Carnegie, but his contribution to education was considerable. As well as funding 24 libraries, he also gave generously to Mrs Humphry Ward's Tavistock Square settlement, which ran programmes of education for workers. It is fitting therefore that he was honoured by the Stationers' in 1899, for the Company regards education and literacy as important functions.

The Stationers', like many other livery companies, had its own school, originally located near to the Hall in the City, which eventually moved out to Hornsey. The running and financing of the school passed in 1967 to Haringey Council and it was closed in 1983 when it fell prey to the disapproval of Bernie Grant, who considered it to be elitist. Instead, the Company sponsors the Crown Woods Academy in Eltham in Kent.

Stationers' Crown Woods Academy

Very different in look to John Passmore's establishments, but with the same idea.

Despite the rather lofty declaration that the Company would not dally with princes, the Master in 1934 was no less than Edward, Prince of Wales, who was soon to become, albeit briefly, King Edward VIII. He was the Honorary Master of the Newspaper Makers' Company, although he was more practised in making news than making newspapers. When the Newspaper Makers combined with the Stationers' in 1934, he became Master of the united company, so that he too appears on the roll of honour in the dining hall. Other members of the royal family with connections with the Company as honorary freemen are the present Prince of Wales and the Duchess of York, both authors of children's books. Two Prime Ministers have also been honoured: Stanley Baldwin in 1927, before he moved into No 10, and Harold Macmillan, who worked at one stage in his family's publishing business.

You may have noticed that the Duchess of York is the first woman that I have mentioned. In fact, women do make an appearance in the records of the Company from the earliest times. Elizabeth Pickering Jackson married Robert Redman in 1537 and when he died three years later, she continued to run his press. Most references are like this, to widows taking on the husband's business, sometimes in association with their sons, and were made freemen. One set of records, from the 1630s, show that Joy Phillips was apprenticed, and subsequently became a freeman of the Company in her own right. It is estimated that 320 women worked

in the London trade between 1550 and 1700, and three quarters were widows or wives. But no woman appears as a Master of the Company until last year, when Helen Esmonde was the first to take on the role.

My final Stationer is an honorary freeman, but very definitely ‘in the trade’, reflecting the future of the communication industry.

Vint Cerf

Vint Cerf, who was born in New Haven in Connecticut in 1943, has had a highly distinguished career, beginning early when he worked on the Apollo programme while still in high school. In 1976 he joined the United States Department of Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency, a mouthful that is usually known as DARPA. Here he played a key role in leading the development of internet and internet-related data packet and security technologies. As a result he has been called the ‘Father of the Internet’. He has also served as a vice president and chief Internet evangelist for Google; in this role he is responsible for identifying new enabling technologies to support the development of products and services based on the internet.

Vint Cerf has been accorded many honours and is the member of a bewildering number of organisations and societies, so the Stationers’ Company was delighted that he accepted the invitation to become an honorary freeman and also became a liveryman. In September 2016 an evening was held at Stationers’ Hall in association with two very modern livery companies, the Marketors and Information Technologists, where Vint Cerf told the story of how he and his colleagues developed the internet, and then looked at whether it can survive in its current form.

Just as back in the early 16th century the ‘mistery’ of scriveners, illuminators and binders accepted and embraced the new revolution in technology, the invention and application of printing, so book publishers, newspaper makers and other branches of the stationery industry have to look to the future.

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